



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

## Elementary School Renamed To Honor Héctor Figueroa

ANDREW J. LANZA November 11, 2019



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## **The Héctor Figueroa School opened at the start of the 2019-20 school year**

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Richard A. Carranza today announced the re-naming of PS 398, a Jackson Heights, Queens elementary school to be The Héctor Figueroa School. The re-naming honors the late union leader and 32BJ SEIU President who passed away earlier this year.

“Héctor Figueroa was the embodiment of the fight for fairness and justice. His legacy lives on across the entire City – from workers who now have benefits they deserve to those who continue to draw inspiration from his mission,” said Mayor Bill de Blasio. “Now, children from this school will see his name daily and learn how to take action for what is right.”

“This school community could not have made a more perfect choice to name their school after a Jackson Heights leader who was so dedicated to equity in our schools and our workplaces. As our students learn about the world they’ll also learn that everyone’s voice deserves to be heard, just like Héctor believed deeply. I couldn’t be prouder to celebrate that and honor his legacy,” said Chancellor Richard A. Carranza.

“I am proud, and a little sad, to celebrate PS 398 taking on the name of my dear brother Héctor Figueroa,” said Kyle Bragg, President of 32BJ. “Héctor loved Queens as a place where families from all over the world learned to call each other neighbors, friends, and family. That’s why we are so glad his name and legacy will have a chance to live on in the county he called home, where he was so happy to raise his family and work to make things better for all families.”

Héctor Figueroa was an international labor movement leader and president of the Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which represents more than 175,000 security guards, school cleaners and handypersons, doorpersons and airport workers. Figueroa was a leader in the Fight for 15, a grass-roots effort led by fast-food workers which

started in New York City and grew into a nationwide campaign for a higher minimum wage. Born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Figueroa came from a family of educators; his father was a school principal and his mother was a teacher and principal.

Open for the first time in the 2019-20 school year, The Héctor Figueroa School currently serves 117 Pre-K and Kindergarten students. The Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens has been home to the Figueroa family for years, and will grow to serve 476 students in grades Pre-K through fifth grade. Principal Erica Ureña-Thus engaged school community in this process, which highlighted significant figures from the Jackson Heights community. Students, teachers, and families votes and decided to officially rename the school in his honor.

The state-of-the-art building is fully ADA-accessible, fully air-conditioned, and includes:

- Art, music and science resource rooms
- Reading and speech rooms
- An early childhood playground and rooftop playground for upper grades
- A gymnasium
- A community meeting room

The 476 seats at PS 398 The Héctor Figueroa School will help alleviate overcrowding in District 30 as part of the more than 2,100 new seats created in Queens for the 2019-2020 school year.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, "Hector Figueroa dedicated his life to improving the lives of millions of New Yorkers and Americans. Hector fought tirelessly, not

only for his union brothers and sisters, but also for causes like immigrant rights, social and economic justice, environmental protection, and workplace safety. This deserving honor will help ensure future generations of children will know his name and learn from his legacy of service."

"Héctor Figueroa was a champion for social justice and the rights of all people," Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said, "As the son of two educators, he would have been proud to know that this state-of-the-art school carrying his name will give kids in Queens a quality education and the building blocks they need for a bright future. I hope that these students will be inspired by his legacy of fighting for justice and human rights."

"Héctor Figueroa was a giant in the labor community and a powerful voice for hard-working women and men in New York. His death was a big loss for this City but renaming PS398 in his Queens neighborhood in his honor is a fitting tribute. I look forward to seeing future students thriving at a school named after this important social justice leader and my good friend," said Speaker Corey Johnson.

Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams said, "Héctor Figueroa was an extraordinary leader, a dedicated champion of working people, and an exceptional man. His commitment to the well-being of New Yorkers, within 32BJ and beyond, was absolute, as was his compassion for the struggles many faced. I applaud the city for naming this elementary school in his honor so students and community members can continue to uphold and advance his remarkable legacy."

"Héctor Figueroa was a true champion of the rights and dignity of workers, and he fought tenaciously for families to be able to enjoy better lives," said Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. "It is fitting that his legacy will be kept alive by the renaming of this school, where children in the borough he proudly called home will be afforded the quality education

they will need to succeed in both the workplace and in life."

"Héctor Figueroa was a champion for working people and tireless voice for justice in the labor movement. It is an incredible testament to his impact on New York City that PS 398 in Jackson Heights will be renamed in his honor. The students of PS 398 are some of our city's next generation of leaders — and they and all New Yorkers will forever see Héctor's name and example as the bright beacon it ought to be," said New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer.

"Héctor Figueroa was a model New Yorker who put everything on the line for working-class families and the success of the labor movement. He taught me what it meant to lead with my values, and how to use my voice to speak truth to power. What better way to memorialize his legacy than by sharing his name and story with the students of the city he loved so much. May we all carry on his vision and continue his fight for justice," said Senator Alessandra Biaggi.

"Héctor was a friend, colleague, and proud Queens resident whose dedication to the more than 160,000 property service employees along the Eastern Coast of our country made him a hero to many and one of the most important figures in the American labor movement," said Senator Leroy Comrie. "Héctor understood that the labor movement is about strengthening communities and that no institution is better suited to do that than our public school system. I am glad that The Héctor Figueroa School will carry on his legacy in name and in spirit here in Queens for generations to come," said Senator Leroy Comrie.

"Héctor Figueroa never shied away from taking a principled stand when it came to issues of equality and justice, so it's apt that a school educating New York City children, many of whom will become leaders of their communities, will carry his name, and with it, a piece of his legacy," said Senator John Liu.

Senator Andrew Lanza, Ranking Member of the Senate Labor Committee said, "Naming this school in honor of Héctor Figueroa is fitting and appropriate. Héctor was a true champion in the fight to create good job opportunities for the people of our State. I cherish the many discussions I had with him which were marked by intelligence and civility. I commend the Mayor for this well deserved tribute."

Senator Liz Krueger said, "Héctor Figueroa was an inspiring champion of working people and a tireless advocate for improving the lives all those who labor. It is fitting that kids at PS 398, who may one day pick up the mantle of his fight for justice, will pass under Héctor's name every day on their way to class. Thank you to Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza for honoring Héctor's great contribution to the people of our city."

"I commend Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Richard Carranza for honoring Héctor Figueroa's work and legacy by renaming PS 398 The Héctor Figueroa school," said Senator Shelley B. Mayer, Education Committee Chair. "Héctor Figueroa was a fearless fighter for working people. There is so much that students can learn from his life story and from his strong sense of justice and equity. Héctor Figueroa's spirit will live on in the Jackson Heights community and in the hearts of every worker and family whose life he made better."

"Héctor Figueroa was a larger than life fighter for justice. Naming a public school for him is a powerful way to honor his legacy," said Senator Andrew Gounardes.

"It is so appropriate to name PA 398 in Héctor Figueroa's memory. The son of educators, a leader of working men and women and a homegrown Queens hero, future generations will be able to say with pride "I am a graduate of the Hector Figueroa School," said Senator Toby Ann Stavisky.

Senator James Sanders Jr. said, "It is only fitting that we pay homage to Héctor Figueroa, who was one of the top labor leaders in the country and spearheaded many efforts to ensure workers received better pay and had safer working conditions. It is heartbreaking that he passed away at such a young age. He had so much vision and passion and many more goals I am sure he wanted to accomplish. I hope this school renaming will serve as a reminder to every one of his amazing life."

"Héctor Figueroa was a pillar of the labor community and a leader in our state without equal. Those who loved him certainly miss him and I know they will appreciate the very apt recognition of Hector's life in our school system, where the next generation of New Yorkers will learn the lesson he taught us all too well: ¡Sí se puede!" said Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris.

Senator Jessica Ramos said, "Throughout his lifetime, Héctor Figueroa fought selflessly for all working people. He marched on the frontlines and encouraged us to believe in the collective power of laborers. This is a wonderful way for our community to preserve Figueroa's legacy as a brilliant economist and champion for equality, while honoring his name and teaching the students of P.S. 398 about Figueroa's amazing influence in the world."

Senator Luis Sepúlveda said, "Héctor Figueroa was a valiant fighter for labor rights in New York City and across the country. His vision and commitment to justice and equity profoundly shaped and led the labor rights movement, achieving historic progress and touching countless individual lives and communities. Honoring Hector's noble legacy with the renaming of PS 398 embodies the ideals and values he stood for and would want our youth and future generations to thrive in."

Assembly Member Michael DenDekker said, "It is truly fitting that PS 398Q be renamed after my long-time constituent and brother in labor, Héctor Figueroa. Students that are attending

this school for years to come will learn of the tireless work of Mr. Figueroa, who strove to improve social and economic conditions for all working men and women.”

“I cannot think of a more deserving person, leader, advocate and educator than Héctor Figueroa to re-name PS 398Q after. Hector’s legacy for this city and working families will live on forever through the building and molding of young minds. I am honored to watch history in the making,” said Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman.

“Héctor Figueroa was a terrific, warm and genuine person who made enormous contributions on behalf of workers in New York and around the country, and I am delighted to see a school being named in his honor. What a fitting tribute to a leader who is sorely missed, and whose legacy will continue,” said Assembly Member Deborah Glick.

“Héctor spent a lifetime fighting for the rights of working class and immigrant New Yorkers, including access to education, better working conditions, and respect for human rights. The Hector Figueroa School will serve hundreds of families, many of them immigrants directly impacted by the policies he fought so hard for. I can’t think of a more beautiful tribute to his dedication and I look forward to children and families honoring his legacy in years to come,” said Assembly Member Catalina Cruz.

" Héctor Figueroa was an outstanding labor leader who embodied all that a union president should be, fierce for his members of course, but also fully engaged and committed to the community around him. His support for full and equitable education funding never wavered. He also was a parent and understood the support his members needed for their children too. It was an honor to work with him on behalf of the New York State Assembly's Education Committee" said Assembly Member Catherine Nolan, Deputy Speaker.



“Héctor Figueroa was an indefatigable advocate for working-class New Yorkers. He dedicated his life to the service of others and it was an honor to work alongside him for so many years, though not nearly enough. I am heartened to know that his spirit will live on in the children inspired by his memory at the Héctor Figueroa School,” said Council Member Francisco Moya.

“Héctor Figueroa was a giant in the labor movement and an inspiration to Latinos across New York and beyond,” said Council Member Antonio Reynoso. “The son of educators, Héctor knew the importance of education and used his prominence to help empower the working class. Now, the renaming of PS 398 will pay homage to this remarkable man while serving as a reminder to generations of immigrant families that through education, anything is attainable.”

“Héctor lived and breathed the movement – from his youth he was immersed in the language of labor justice and was raised to believe that a better world was possible, and must be fought for. Having been the son of two school principals, naming PS 398 in his honor is a fitting tribute to carry on his legacy,” said Council Member Robert E. Cornegy, Jr. “Through a lifetime of service and fortitude, Héctor left an enduring mark on this fabric of this great City. He was a principled fighter, and this naming will inspire young people to follow his lead by standing up and speaking out for what is right and just.”

“I knew Héctor Figueroa to be a kind and gentle person who treated everyone with great respect and fought hard on behalf of his members,” said Council Member Barry S. Grodenchik. “The naming of PS 398Q is a beautiful tribute to his memory.”

"Héctor Figueroa was a man of the people devoted to making sure working-class New Yorkers had a fair chance at a good life here in our great City," said Council Member Ben Kallos. "What better role model can our children have than that of a man who worked to

bring fairness and respect to New Yorkers who through their work make this City a great place to live. Hector was a natural-born leader who through his work improved the lives of countless workers. He was a friend and I am proud our City is honoring his legacy with the P.S. 398 The Héctor Figueroa school."

"Héctor drove change by bringing New Yorkers together and always putting them first. In renaming P.S. 398 in his honor, his spirit and commitment will live on and inspire our youngest New Yorkers to change the city around them, just as Héctor did," said Council Member Keith Powers.

"Héctor Figueroa was a remarkable community leader and champion for working people, and I want to commend Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Richard A. Carranza for recognizing his legacy with the re-naming of PS 398 in Queens. As the President of the Local 32BJ SEIU, Mr. Figueroa embodied the passion and dedication that is needed to create equality in the workforce. The re-naming of PS 398 as The Héctor Figueroa School is a testament of his life's work that will undoubtedly have a positive impact on future generations of New Yorkers," said Council Member Mathieu Eugene.

"No one spoke of the concerns of working people like my dear friend, the late Héctor Figueroa," said New York City Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer. "Héctor led one of the most powerful labor unions in the City, was a force in local, state and national politics and led the expansion of his union to include more than 175,000 workers. But every time I sat with him, it was like sitting with an old friend. In a time in which there is much to be cynical about, Hector showed a disarming sincerity that was deeply affecting. He cared about the struggle of working people like few in politics, government or unions did. We lost a legend. While he would probably not love having a school named after him, it is a fitting honor for a man who so deeply loved learning and teaching everyone he met."

"I couldn't think of a better way to honor the life and legacy of Héctor Figueroa than the renaming of a brand new school that will provide students of color exciting new opportunities to be the best and brightest New York City has to offer," said Council Member Donovan Richards. "Héctor came from a family of educators, which is why he was so good at teaching all of us where the right side of an issue was and how organizing was the best path forward. I am a better elected official today because of him and I know this new school will ensure that the students of Queens will be better at paving the path for NYC to move forward. I'd like to thank Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Carranza for honoring Héctor in such an appropriate manner."

"Re-naming P.S. 398 for Héctor Figueroa gives its students and the community a permanent reminder of a role model for leadership and compassion. Kind and caring, Héctor exercised exceptional leadership at the helm of the largest building trades union in the United States, evidenced by a membership increase of 50,000 under his watch. His human compassion drove him beyond the ranks of his members to stand with workers in other industries for decent wages and working conditions. Héctor Figueroa was a true hero of working people. We are upholding Hector's example for students to learn from and to follow in his footsteps in whatever career they choose," said Council Member Fernando Cabrera.

"Héctor Figueroa was a stalwart labor leader and an outspoken advocate for 32BJ members and workers everywhere," said Council Member Paul Vallone. "The re-naming of the Héctor Figueroa School is a fitting honor to his tremendous legacy as an effective and passionate fighter for thousands of working Americans and their families."

"Héctor Figueroa was a lifelong champion for those who desperately needed one. I can't think of a more inspirational tribute to his life and legacy than a house of learning bearing his good name," said Council Member Kalman Yeger.

“Renaming a school in memory of someone is not only an honor but it also provides inspiration for the students that attend the school and for the people who live in the community,” said Council Member Adrienne Adams. “Héctor Figueroa was a passionate fighter for working people everywhere and his legacy of excellence is what we want our students and community to represent. I am thrilled that PS 398 will carry Hector Figueroa’s name so that we can continue to see ourselves in his greatness and others can rise to his example.”

"Héctor Figueroa was deeply devoted to improving the lives of working people, and he remains an inspiration to so many activists and organizers continuing to lead their own fights for justice. By renaming P.S. 398 today, Mayor de Blasio both rightly honors Héctor’s legacy, and creates an opportunity for young students to be constantly reminded that we can and must stand up for what is right," said Peter Ward, President of the New York Hotel Trades Council.

"Héctor Figueroa dedicated his entire professional life to seeking racial, social, and economic justice for all working people and their families," said New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO President Vincent Alvarez. "He fought for a society that recognizes the dignity and honors the aspirations of all people, and it's fitting that children in one of our most diverse and vibrant communities will be able to grow and learn surrounded by Héctor's values."

George Miranda, Teamsters Joint Council 16 President, said, "Héctor Figueroa was a giant in the labor movement. He left behind a vibrant local union and a labor movement with a model for organizing the unorganized. The Department of Education's creation of the The Héctor Figueroa School is a fitting celebration of his legacy and love for New York's immigrant and working families."

“Héctor was an intellectual giant, an unwavering moral compass, and a human being who lived each moment with such humbleness and kindness, it would take you aback and melt

your heart. Among all in the labor movement, he was just the real deal. I can think of no one more deserving and no legacy better to remind our children of how to have a life well lived. This is a beautiful gesture by the Mayor. I thank him deeply from my heart," said Bhairavi Desai of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance.